

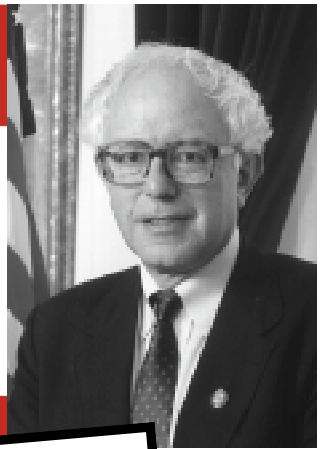


U.S. Representative

Bernie Sanders

*Focus on Women's Issues*

April 2000



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

*Dear Fellow Vermonter,*

Knowing your interest in women's issues, I want to take this opportunity to provide you with an update on the status of several important issues being discussed in Congress, including the rights, health, and safety of women in this country.

When most people think about women's issues, reproductive rights and child care are among the first to come to mind. The truth is, however, that as important as those issues are, concerns like health care, retirement security, and a living wage are equally important even though they are not usually regarded as "women's issues."

When we talk about Social Security, for example, we should not forget that women represent 60% of all Social Security recipients and 72% of recipients age 85 years and older. Social Security is even more important to women since, of the 50 million workers in the United States with no pension, nearly two-thirds are women. That is why a strong and stable Social Security system must be adequately funded.

Increasing the minimum wage and creating a living wage would have a tremendous effect on Vermont women as women comprise 65% of Vermont's labor force and are more likely than men to hold minimum wage jobs. A typical woman in Vermont today earns a mere 79 cents for every dollar a man earns. Despite gains made against gender discrimination in education and employment, women are still being paid less for doing the same work as men.

One of the most serious issues plaguing women and children in this country continues to be domestic violence. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, over 50% of all women will experience physical violence in an intimate relationship during their lifetime. Thirty-three percent of women in this country live with an abusive partner and between 25 and 30% of battered women lose their jobs due to the emotional and physical duress that violence in the home causes them. Domestic violence may primarily affect women, however, it will not end until *women and men*, young and old, take a stand against it.

I hope that you will find the information contained in this newsletter helpful and informative. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact my office. I can be reached at **1 Church Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Burlington, VT 05401, (800) 339-9834**, or in Washington at **2202 Rayburn House Office Building Washington, D.C. 20515, (202) 225-4115**. You can also contact me through e-mail at [bernie@mail.house.gov](mailto:bernie@mail.house.gov). I would also urge you to log on to my home page at [bernie.house.gov](http://bernie.house.gov). This award-winning website has a great deal of information about Congress and many links that I believe you'll find useful.

Sincerely yours,

*Bernie*  
Bernard Sanders  
U.S. Congressman

# Women's Access to Health Care

While we continue the fight for a national health care program which will guarantee health care to all Americans, it is important that we be mindful of the unique health care problems facing women in our country today.

It is no secret that women are disproportionately represented among the



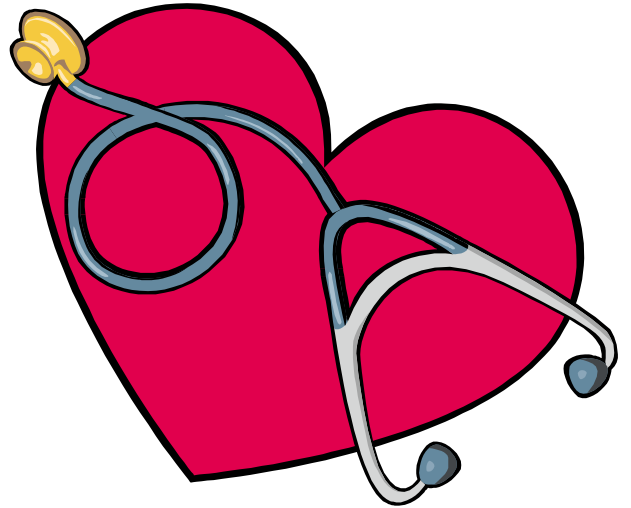
44 million people in this country lacking health care insurance. Incredibly, 19% of all women lack health care insurance, and 69% of these women are unable to afford pre-natal care. These figures are compounded by the fact that many uninsured women are single mothers. Thus, when Congress talks about cutting

Medicaid and Medicare, it is talking about restricting health care access to millions of women and children.

In addition to adequate funding, we need to make sure that federal health programs address women's special health care needs. For instance, even though women make up about 60% of Medicaid recipients, Medicaid does not cover breast cancer treatment for women diagnosed with this disease. For that reason, I have joined 282 of my colleagues in co-sponsoring legislation that would grant states the option of providing medical treatment for breast and cervical cancer under Medicaid. Given that 2.6 million women in this country suffer from breast cancer and breast cancer is the second most likely disease to claim a woman's life, this legislation is long overdue.

Women also comprise about 60% of Medicare recipients, largely due to the fact that women, on average, live six years longer than men. Since elderly women are twice as likely as men to be living in poverty, strengthening and preserving Medicare is very important for them. Medicare also provides health care for younger women who become disabled. Currently, Medicare covers hospitalization costs, some outpatient hospital services, home health care, and some preventative services. It does not,

however, cover prescription drugs. Considering that 78% of women on Medicare use prescription drugs on a regular basis, it is imperative that Congress pass legislation to add a prescription drug benefit to Medicare. As you may know, I have made prescription drug pricing reform and a Medicare drug benefit two of my top priorities.



## Preserving Choice

While I recognize that Vermonters hold different opinions about abortion and birth control, I remain a firm proponent of a woman's right to choose. I feel very strongly that this is an issue between a woman and her physician, and that the government has no right to intervene other than to ensure the protection of a woman's health.

I am extremely concerned that Congress continues to chip away at Roe v. Wade and a woman's right to choose. Five out of the thirteen appropriations bills in 1999 contained provisions that restricted the use of federal funds for abortions. Last year, the House also passed the Child Custody Protection Act which, if passed by the Senate and signed by the President, would make it a criminal offense to transport a minor across state lines to obtain an abortion without parental consent. While most minors involve their parents when seeking an abortion, this bill does not consider the young women who cannot, for various reasons, involve a parent in this decision.

Congress most recently passed legislation to ban so-called "partial birth" abortions. Fortunately, the

President has promised to veto this irresponsible piece of legislation that would effectively ban a broad range of abortion procedures that are used at all stages of pregnancy, not just late-term pregnancies. Specifically, this legislation bans intact d&e, one of the *safest* abortion procedures. Physicians most often choose this method because of its safety for women seeking an abortion as a result of health reasons or fetal abnormalities. This legislation makes no exception for either case.

On a positive note, Congress passed legislation requiring all federal employee health plans to guarantee women subscribing to these plans access to "contraceptive coverage" in the same manner that these plans cover other prescriptions. The Vermont Legislature passed similar legislation last year which requires health insurance plans in Vermont to provide coverage for all FDA-approved contraceptives. I am also cosponsoring legislation, H.R. 2120, which would create equity in insurance prescription coverage nationwide.

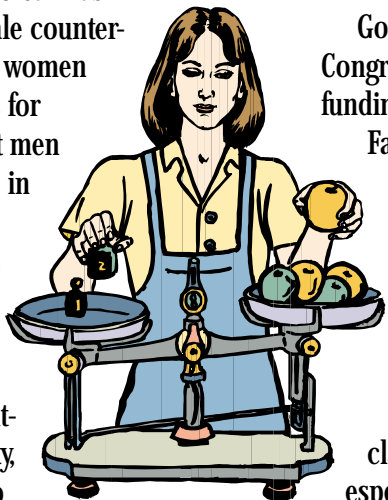


# Working Women

## Pay Equity

Ironically, women will achieve pay equity with men this year on Mothers' Day. This day, Pay Equity Day, symbolizes the point into the new year that a woman must work to earn the wages paid to a man in the previous calendar year. In other words, it takes a woman four months longer to earn as much as her male counterpart. Nationally, women earned 73 cents for every dollar that men earned in 1998; in 1997, they earned 74 cents for every dollar. According to the National Committee on Pay Equity, this translates to about \$9,483 less a year that a woman has to spend on groceries, housing, child care, health care and other expenses.

For this reason, I am an original cosponsor of the Fair Pay Act which



would amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to provide stronger enforcement of anti-discrimination laws with respect to wages and offer more protection for workers who seek relief under those laws.

## Child Care and Family Leave

Going above and beyond equal pay, Congress must also increase federal funding for child care and expand the Family and Medical Leave Act. About 70% of single mothers work outside the home. Most of these women rely on paid child care which can cost anywhere from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per year per child. For many middle and working class families, and especially for single women, such costs make child care out of reach. On the other hand, over 60% of women with babies under age one are in the labor force simply because

they cannot afford to take unpaid leave. This puts many women in a no-win situation. Congress needs to increase funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant Program to ensure that all parents and guardians are able to afford quality child care. Moreover, there must be federal and state action to expand the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) to ensure that all full-time employees are able to take *paid leave* to care for a new baby, sick family member, spouse, or parent. Given that this responsibility tends to fall on women, such a change would greatly benefit working women.



# Stopping Domestic Violence

## Ending Discrimination

I am very pleased to inform you that legislation I originally introduced four years ago to prohibit insurance providers from discriminating against domestic violence victims and battered women's shelters was signed into law last November. This is an extremely important provision that prevents insurance companies from denying coverage to victims of domestic violence or charging them higher rates. We must ensure that victims of domestic violence can seek the help they need without risking the loss of insurance coverage for themselves and their children.

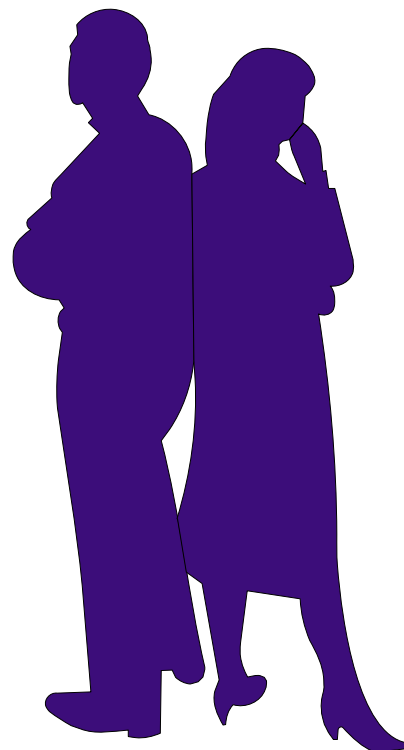
## Violence Against Women Act

Not only must we tear down the walls that prevent victims of domestic violence from seeking help, but we must also ensure that the support services — including women's shelters, law enforce-

ment, and professional counseling — are available to these women. With the passage of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 1994, Congress took a major first step toward implementing these important programs and services. Vermont alone has received over \$6.8 million from VAWA. In my view, Congress must reauthorize these programs and expand VAWA to include housing assistance for domestic violence victims, greater access to legal services, and anti-violence education programs.

The truth is that domestic violence is more of a "men's issue" than a "women's issue." It is an American crisis that we all must address. VAWA 99, the bill to reauthorize VAWA, includes language I originally introduced that calls for a National Summit on Sports and Domestic Violence. As influential role models for boys throughout the country, sports figures have a unique ability to speak out against domestic

violence and sexual assault. Male and female athletes alike can play an important role in educating young people about domestic violence.





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*If you receive more than one copy of this newsletter, we apologize. Please feel free to pass the extra copy along to an interested friend.*

*This mailing was prepared, published, and mailed at taxpayer expense.*

Phone Numbers of Interest to Vermont Women

*For information and updates concerning the work I am doing in Congress as well as town meetings and conferences I will be holding in Vermont, visit my Web Page on the Internet at: [bernie.house.gov](http://bernie.house.gov)*

Vermont Governor's Commission on Women .....	1-800-881-1561
Vermont Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Sexual Abuse .....	802-651-1663
Vermont Department of Health, Maternal and Child Health .....	802-863-7270
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Regional Office .....	617-565-3200
Vermont Department of Labor and Industry, Wage & Hour Division .....	802-828-2157
Vermont Human Rights Commission .....	802-828-2480
Vermont Department of Health Ladies First Program .....	1-800-510-2282

Gender-Related Persecution Around the World

Last year, I successfully passed legislation requiring that Secretary of State Madeline Albright establish a task force to draw up new eligibility guidelines for women seeking refugee status due to gender-related persecution. Gender-related persecution

includes culturally and societally-condoned domestic abuse and female genital mutilation. U.S. law must recognize that violence against

women – solely because they are women – constitutes serious human rights violations, and that these victims should be eligible for asylum. It is my hope that this Women Refugee Task Force will pave the way for significant change to U.S. immigration law.

